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SUBJECT: TURKEY: VIOLENT CIVIL UNREST IN SE AT HIGHEST LEVEL IN RECENT YEARS

11. (U) Summary: March 28 funeral ceremonies for PKK killed by security forces turned violent around southeastern Turkey, including in Diyarbakir, Adana, Batman and Siirt, when large crowds, waving PKK flags and shouting pro-Ocalan slogans, confronted security forces with Molotov cocktails and stones. Police responded with truncheons, tear gas and water cannon. Dozens have been injured and detained. This is the highest level of violence from civil unrest in the southeast in recent years. End summary.

12. (SBU) Television footage showed extensive looting and property damage from March 28 demonstrations in Diyarbakir; media reported that 20 journalists, at least 8 security officials and 25 protestors were injured; 50 demonstrators were taken into custody. The media reported that control of the entire city of Diyarbakir had been taken over by military forces for the first time since the end of the 1987-2001 state of emergency. The Diyarbakir Governor explained to us that he called in 250 extra police officers from neighboring provinces and deployed paramilitary jandarma forces at two critical points in the city to help control the large crowds. (Comment: While it is not unusual for jandarma to be used to quell demonstrations, this is the first time in the past three years that such large groups of police from neighboring provinces have been deployed along with large numbers of jandarma in an instance of civil unrest. End comment.)

13. (SBU) Our contacts in Diyarbakir told us that people were demonstrating because they were angry at the way the PKK guerrillas in Mus had been killed. The PKK claimed security forces used chemical weapons against them. (Comment: We have no means to verify this independently. Media reported that some relatives of the deceased claimed that they could not find any bullet holes in the bodies; one contact in Diyarbakir told us that blood samples from the corpses would be sent to Istanbul for examination to determine if chemicals were used, but expectations of receiving conclusive results are low. End comment.) Our contacts claimed "the whole town (of Diyarbakir) has turned into a battlefield," and that "ordinary people are very much bothered by these events."

14. (SBU) On March 29, as of this writing, protest activities and clashes have re-started and are continuing in Diyarbakir. By mid-afternoon, the number of injured exceeded 100, including police, protestors and journalists. Shopkeepers closed their workplaces, protestors burned tires in the streets, and security forces closed some roads. The media reported that a 22 year old man was shot dead by security forces and another youth was wounded when security forces opened fire on him. The Southeast Chamber of Commerce (GUNSIAD) and Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce (DISIAD) along with other business and civil society organizations in the city issued a joint press statement calling for an end to the violence in Diyarbakir. The Armed People Initiative declared that "Diyarbakir people are doing their duties against the attacks," and called on Kurdish people in Istanbul and Mersin provinces to join the protests, according to the press. Meanwhile, Turkish Airlines told us that Diyarbakir airport remains open, but some flights are delayed. Some clashes between security forces and protestors are taking place near the airport and are creating obstacles delaying or preventing some passengers from reaching the open terminal. There are significant numbers of security forces deployed in the vicinity of the airport, according to Turkish Airlines in Diyarbakir.

15. (U) Nearly 5,000 people reportedly demonstrated in Adana on March 28. During the funeral procession for one PKK member killed in fighting near Mus, police used tear gas and water cannon against the mourners' Molotov cocktails and stones. Mourners carried PKK flags and banners and shouted pro-Ocalan slogans. Police took an undisclosed number of marchers into custody.

16. (SBU) Contacts in Batman and Siirt told us that large crowds held similar funeral processions in those cities on March 28, but that the situation is currently calm. Our contact in Siirt told us that at least 3 people have been detained. Press reports claim that a 16-year-old boy was shot and seriously wounded by security forces in Siirt while he was attempting to raise a PKK flag. Our contact in Batman told us that as many as

20 people have been detained, with no reported injuries.

17. (SBU) Comment: Diyarbakir, Adana, Batman and Siirt are the hometowns of some of the 14 PKK guerrillas that were killed in Mus. The remainder of the guerillas came from Iran, Iraq and Syria. These protest events represent the highest level of civil unrest and violence in the southeast since the 2001 end to the state of emergency. This increased violence is a departure from the relatively calm pro-PKK demonstrations over the past two years. We expect the GOT will claim that the PKK has been able to mobilize its urban cadres to use the funerals of the guerrillas killed in Mus to stage a regional provocation campaign. End comment.
REID